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On target at the River Lions game

JULIE JOCSAK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Isabella Brenzil takes part in a shoot-off, which she won, during a break at the Niagara River Lions home opener against the Kitchener Titans at the Meridian Centre in downtown St. Catharines on Tuesday, December 27. The team played last night in London for their season opener and won 107-106.



Debbie Pine
SALES REPRESENTATIVE



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Second stunting charge laid against driver within weeks

A Lowbanks resident has been hit with his second stunting charge. On Tuesday the Niagara Regional Police stopped a vehicle on Feeder Road in Valinville

operated by driver who was charged with stunt driving—with a clocked speed of 131 km/h in a posted 80 km/h zone. The driver has a lengthy record of Highway Traffic Act offences, including a charge of stunting this

past November, police said. The driver will now face provincial sanctions which include a mandatory seven-day vehicle impoundment, administrative driver's licence suspension and a monetary fine of up to \$10,000.

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Frequently turning up the volume on the television can be one of the first signs of an undetected high frequency hearing loss. This type of hearing loss is caused by damage to microscopic cells deep within our inner ears called "hair cells." Normally, these hair cells detect incoming sounds and change them into information our brain uses to hear. With a high-frequency hearing loss, the hair cells that let us hear soft, high-pitched speech sounds are damaged, which can make speech sound unclear or mumbled.

Most people won't notice this drop in speech clarity right away, because they are usually listening to only one or two people in a quiet area, and get plenty of visual cues from the person talking. When watching television, there can be loud music in the background, people speaking fast or with an accent, and you cannot always see the face of the person talking. While turning up the volume helps a little, it will not improve the clarity you are missing out on.

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Province says it can't audit NPCA

GRANT LAFLECHE
Postmedia Network

Ontario's minister of natural resources and forestry says she does not have the authority to conduct an audit of Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

In a letter to local councils, including the City of St. Catharines, circulated to the media Thursday, McGarry said reviews of that nature are out of her hands.

"I regret to inform you that the current avenue to address any concerns with the management of the NPCA would be through your own municipal-appointed representatives on the NPCA board," McGarry wrote.

"The ministry does not have the legislative ability to order a forensic audit. The province oversees the policy relating to conservation authorities but it is municipalities, like you, who have the sole authority to appoint the boards. MNRF's interests are in flood control and watershed management, and we have no hand in the operations or operational oversight of the conservation authorities."

Several Niagara municipalities have called on the province to audit the NPCA after the release of a citizens report alleging mismanagement at the authority.

Ed Smith distributed a report that accused the NPCA of using questionable practices and conflicts of interest. In response, the

NPCA threatened legal action against Smith and demanded an apology. Smith has not backed down.

Since the release of the report, councils in Pelham, Wainfleet, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Port Colborne, Welland and Hamilton have called for an NPCA audit. Some asked the NPCA to hire a third party to conduct an audit, while others have called upon the province to do it.

Welland went so far as to ask the Ontario Provincial Police to conduct the review. In her letter, McGarry said the province is reviewing the Conservation Authorities Act,

which governs bodies such as the NPCA, "to ensure it is meeting the modern needs of Ontarians."

That review included the opportunity for the public to provide comments from May to September on the government's environmental registry website.

A ministry spokeswoman was not able to say when the review will be completed.

"My ministry has identified five key priorities that are the current focus of the review, one of which is strengthening oversight and accountability in conservation authority decision-making," McGarry wrote.

"I am aware that improvements can be made to strengthen conservation authority governance and accountability and will be looking to do this when we move forward with new legislation."

Under the act as it stands, however, McGarry said she cannot order an audit. She said a request for an audit should be made to the representatives of the NPCA board of directors.



EDUARDO LIMA / THE CANADIAN PRESS
Kathryn McGarry, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

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The Board includes representation from housing providers, regional council, tenants and the general public.

Special consideration will be given to those with financial experience and/or an understanding of the legal environment, social policy development, contract evaluation, government relations and human resources. As our clients represent a diverse array of multi-cultural groups, experience with various ethnic groups would also be considered an asset.

Applications are available at www.nrhc.ca or by calling Regional Councillor Paul Grenier, NRH Chair at 905-980-6000 x 3965. The deadline for submissions is January 13, 2017. We thank all interested parties; but only those being considered for positions will be contacted.

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Plan ahead and don't drink and drive

The holiday season is a celebration of consumption, never more so than with New Year's Eve. Some of the seasonal treats taste like peppermint or are covered in chocolate — but that's not the type of stuff we need to worry about going through our systems as we attend various functions and parties during the holidays and beyond.

Not that there's anything wrong with tipping an adult beverage back with your friends, family and favourite co-workers for a few more days. Just make sure you do it wisely.

When you enjoy some libations locally, best do it at a location within walking distance from where you plan to rest your

head at the end of the night, or have a designated driver.

If you're depending on a local taxi then you're either very new to the area or have never experienced the horrific reality that this service is virtually non-existent when it is needed the most.

They are readily available on a Wednesday afternoon for your grandma's weekly trip to the supermarket, and that's great.

What about the group of childhood friends who only get together as one unit once a year for a special celebration?

The ones who have careers, families and everything going for them and always play it safe by calling a cab when celebrating in the respective cities they moved to — it's a

lot different than what they're used to.

Spending a few days in some of Niagara's smaller municipalities, such as Niagara-on-the-Lake or Fort Erie, can put everything at risk.

You may find yourself standing outside in sub-zero temperatures, trying to figure out how to get home after an entertaining evening out. It's already 2:30 a.m. and the taxi dispatcher says all their cars are busy and it will be at least a three-hour wait.

Meanwhile, you see your own vehicle parked 50 feet away and know you can make it to your destination a few blocks over.

Aside from all the horrific tragedies where innocent people lose their lives to

drunk driving, including possibly your own, there are other ways it can ruin lives, too, without any physical injury involved.

This occurs when someone decides to take the risk of driving home because getting a cab, which seems like such a simple task, was impossible during the festive season, after a graduation party, or after a night out playing cards when you know you have had one too many.

So, be prepared throughout this coming year: sleep on a couch, have a designated driver lined up, stay home, or visit a local watering hole in your neighbourhood.

Drinking and driving means risking a life, or a future, and it's not worth it. — *Special to Postmedia Network*

Fentanyl crisis demands bold shift in treating drug addiction

LARRY CAMPBELL
 Special to Postmedia Network

It is time to face reality. We must actively seek new solutions to address the fentanyl crisis and be more proactive on an emergent basis.

The existing strategies to treat the disease called drug addiction are not working — more than 800 people will die in B.C. this year.

We expect this number to continue to grow as more and varied compounds are introduced both domestically and from overseas. Think of the steps that were implemented immediately to prevent and treat SARS and the Zika virus.

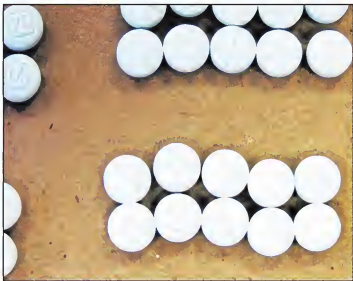
And yet we refuse to move quickly and decisively on what is described in B.C. as a public health emergency.

Why has this not been declared a public health emergency in the rest of Canada?

Last week, the federal government introduced Bill C-37. This will undo the draconian measures of the previous government, which were based on fear, not science.

Within this bill are measures to allow for borders agents to open letter mail that has pill presses used to manufacture fake opiate pills.

All of these measures certainly will assist in keeping fentanyl and other opiates from coming into the country. But we need to be more proactive on an emergent basis.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fentanyl, a drug 100 times stronger than morphine, is now being found on streets.

Drugs will continue to enter and be made in this country. Even if we could stop fentanyl, there will

always be other drugs manufactured and sold on the street. We need to treat the disease of drug addiction rather than continuing to

depend on interdiction and law enforcement.

All levels of government need to support prescription opiate replacement therapy like suboxone, methadone, and stronger drugs like hydromorphone (dilauid) and diacetylmorphine (heroin). Replacement therapies treat withdrawal symptoms with opiates that are pharmaceutical and not contaminated.

We know that supervised injection sites work to prevent death and address the issues relating to public disorder — we should also be offering opiate-replacement therapy through supervised injection sites.

People suffering from addictions should be seen by a doctor. The doctor can then make decisions on what therapy would work best. Prescriptions would be issued that can only be filled at a supervised injection site or other similar medical facility. The medicine would be administered at the site, with no drugs leaving.

We as citizens must hold our politicians to account.

Do we have to wait until this public health emergency reaches Ontario and Quebec before the federal government reacts? How many more people have to die? How many families need to suffer?

Rise up. Demand action. The next person who dies a preventable death may be your family member or friend.

— Larry Campbell is a Canadian senator and former mayor of Vancouver.

Slushy start to day includes upside-down vehicle

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

Police and emergency vehicles dealt with a slippery Niagara last Thursday morning, but not an overwhelming one.

While roads were slushy to start the day, CAA Niagara said staff weren't overly busy responding to roadside assistance calls.

"It's been normal, really. It's been a light morning," said Bill Willard, vice-president of automotive service. "We didn't have the temperatures that turned into ice."

While there was a "flurry of calls" between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., Willard said things had "calmed right down" by 10 a.m. Many of the calls involved vehicles needing tows after hitting curbs.

"That's the common thing when you get the slush and ice." Thick snow in the morning was accompanied by temperatures in the 1°C to 3°C range. Had it dropped below the freezing point, the morning drive would have been much more hazardous.

"It would have been a different story if the temperatures had dove down, for sure."

It's uncertain whether slick roads contributed to an early morning collision in Niagara Falls that left a vehicle upside down in a shopping plaza.

Niagara Regional Police said a vehicle left the road near the corner of McLeod and Kalar roads at about 6:30 a.m. It struck a pole and some signs, then flipped over at Pinewood Plaza.

The vehicle sustained "extensive" damage, said Sgt. Nilan Dave.

The driver was uninjured, but charged with careless driving. Dave said Thursday morning crashes weren't "off the charts,"

with drivers taking precautions on the slick roads.

"It's not out of control."

JOHN LAW/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara drivers faced slick roads Thursday morning, but police and CAA Niagara say their call volumes were normal.



Fonthill and District Kinsmen are accepting submissions for their annual Pelham Citizen of the Year Award, 2016

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PenFinancial to open Fonthill branch

LAURA BARTON
Postmedia Network

Fonthill will see a PenFinancial Credit Union branch begin to take shape next spring at the Marketplace development.

The credit union aims to have its doors open by the fall.

Chief executive officer Ken Janzen said there has never been a PenFinancial branch in that area of the region before, but there has been a demand for it.

"We found we actually have a good market in Fonthill that was being served both by our Welland and, actually, from our St. Catharines locations,"

he said.

While people can still choose to go to those branches if they please, Janzen said opening one up in Fonthill is about convenience.

Janzen said another thing the credit union tries to do is stay local.

"Our brand is truly local banking. We want our branches to be an experience," he said. "Our vision in the mission statement is enriching lives in communities and bettering communities, so we'll very much respect the local community that we function in so we'll look for ways to honour the history of that community."

The bank is embracing the

local aspect by having a "boutique-style" branch. He said rather than just being a financial institution, it's about making sure members have a special, comfortable experience.

Janzen said the new building along Regional Road 20 is a good fit for the branch because of the numerous other shops and residential buildings going up in that area.

"It fits our branch strategy to place ourselves in good locations to give people access."

Another way the company works to give people access is through the "ask the CEO" e-mail. The e-mail can be used for any questions a member



SUPPLIED IMAGE

Illustration of the PenFinancial Credit Union branch coming to Fonthill in 2017.

has or to give feedback about their experience. Members can send those questions and

comments to askthecceo@penfinancial.com. PenFinancial serves close to

21,000 members and has been a part of the Niagara region for 60 years.

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Survey spotlights Niagara dads' needs

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

According to Statistics Canada, there are about 4,000 births in Niagara every year. And that means many new dads who may need services and supports to help them raise their children.

To that end, Niagara Region's public health department is hosting a survey designed to get a better handle on the interests and needs of local dads.

The fathering survey at niagararegion.ca/health is an initiative of the Dad Central Niagara group of service partners.

Its questions include those that pertain to activities done with children, as well as routines and family activities. One asks how the dad shows love and appreciation to the child.

Fathers are also asked to rate their community as one that supports children, and looks closely into the survey-taker's demographics.

The survey notes that by father, it means any biological dad, boyfriend, stepfather, grandfather, adoptive dad, or caregiver.

"Dad Central Niagara is hoping to use this information to help support community priorities for fathers," said Jeff Bilech, manager of the public health department's

child health program.

"It will help them plan around supporting fathers and activities."

Bilech said 300 surveys were completed as of Thursday. The survey was launched in June and continues until Father's Day 2017.

"Our goal is to try and gather about 1,000 surveys, so we have a really good and diverse sample of dads in Niagara," said Bilech, also co-chair of Dad Central.

"That way, we'll be able to help support them as much as we can in activities with our community partners, and not just the Region."

Bilech said the survey is not only available on the website, but also in hardcopy form through community partners.

He said early next year, volunteers at community events will also be on hand for fathers to take the surveys.

Dad Central includes Strive Niagara, Brook University, Ontario Early Years Centres, Niagara Region children's services, Kwanis, Family Counselling Centre of Niagara, Family and Children's Services Niagara, Bethlehem Housing and Support Services, and the Early Childhood Development Centre.

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Boxer remembered after body found

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Boxing was everything to Dominic (Mimi) Mercuri.

The 51-year-old Welland resident reached the provincial pinnacle of the sport in the early 1990s, claiming the Ontario championship in the featherweight category "multiple times," said Ray Napper, a coach at Napper's Boxing Club where Mercuri trained throughout his long career.

"He had a lot of experience, and he was a very slick fighter," Napper said. "He had well over 100 fights and you don't get that far without being good."

Long after his own tenure in the ring had ended, Mercuri continued to spend much of his time at the boxing club in Welland that was "his second home," coaching other fighters.

"Ever since 1995, he helped coach at the boxing club off and on," Napper said, adding Mercuri had recently talked about returning to the club as a coach in the coming year.

Napper was at the boxing club Tuesday when he learned Mercuri had died.

Mercuri's body was found Tuesday in the icy waters of the Welland Recreational Canal by the Lincoln Street bridge.

"The coaches and myself and a couple of the boxers all stayed behind after practice and we all shared memories about him," Napper said. "He was a huge part of the boxing club, and helping kids out."

Years ago, when Napper was a competitive boxer, it was Mercuri who helped him reach the national championship level of the sport.

"Mimi really helped me out when I was fighting, and I formed a good bond with him that just carried over," Napper said.

More recently, Mercuri helped Napper train other young boxers, including one athlete who went

on to reach the national championships.

Mercuri's love for the sport was contagious.

"He brought energy and enthusiasm" to the boxing club, Napper said.

"Everybody wanted to work with Mimi because he was a fun guy to be around in the gym, and his passion for boxing is just unbelievable and teaching it in a fun way," he said. "That's why it's such a big loss, especially for the people who don't know him as well."

Mercuri has had trouble with the law in recent years, including a stand-off with police on West

Main Street about a decade ago. But he was also known as a kind and caring person to his numerous friends from throughout the province.

"People from all over Ontario are messaging me, sending condolences about Mimi," Napper said.

Although a funeral service for Mercuri is taking place today, friends at the boxing club are planning to remember him on his birthday today.

"I don't think we're going to do a huge thing for him, but we're going to do a moment of silence for him."

Niagara Regional Police con-

firmed Thursday that the body found earlier this week in the recreational canal was Mercuri. A post-mortem examination conducted Wednesday determined the cause of his death was not suspicious in nature.

Mercuri was reported to have been in Welland hospital for a medical issue about a week before he died.

Police are asking anyone with information about Mercuri's whereabouts in the days leading up to his death to contact Welland detectives at 305-680-4111 ext. 3355, to assist investigators in developing a timeline of his final days.

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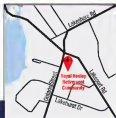
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94 SHELLEY WELLAND
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LOCAL NEWS

Totes to aid foster kids during difficult move

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

For Virginia Workman, it was a difficult thought to process.

The St. Catharines family law lawyer couldn't bear to think about children entering the foster care system and stuffing their possessions, the only remnants of home, into a trash bag for the move.

It's a sad but common occurrence for youths taken into the care of Family and Children's Services Niagara.

At least, until now. Workman has launched Totes for Kids, an initiative that raises funds to provide junior hockey bags to children in hopes of increasing their sense of dignity during such a difficult time.

The program, embraced by the FACS Foundation, works in partnership with Canadian Tire, which has agreed to sell bags to the organization at cost.

Three St. Catharines Canadian Tire stores — on Welland Avenue, Glendale Avenue and Louth Street — have come together to donate the first 100 bags to the cause.

Workman was inspired by the story of a Vancouver woman, a former foster child, who began collecting gently-used suitcases for the same purpose on the West Coast.

"She talked about how difficult it was to move from place to place and basically have only a garbage bag for your belongings," she spoke about how demoralizing it was, how demeaning. "I was really touched by that."

In her profession, Workman



The foundation for Family and Children's Services Niagara is organizing a financial drive to raise money for totes to be used by children who are entering the foster care system. Shown are Virginia Workman, Denise Collins, Tracy Nickle and Meaghan Copman.

BOB TYMCZYK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

often acts on behalf of children in protection instances. Their concerns often revolve around their belongings, the only constant in a flurry of life changes.

"That's at least something that's theirs. Their touchstones, their clothing, their toys," she said. "They've been removed from everything else they know."

After learning FACS had no bags available for children to pack their lives up in when entering care, Workman decided to do something about it.

After speaking with the organization and hearing concerns about storage should used suitcases be collected, she approached Canadian Tire

about coming on board with a model that would see new bags purchased at cost.

This fall she began working with Graham Keene from the Welland Avenue store and the pair found a bag that in bulk could easily be stored.

Workman also began soliciting donations from the community for the cause and has since raised \$11,000.

She's hopeful the program will eventually raise enough funds to become self-sustaining, so it does not take away from other FACS Foundation initiatives.

At any given time, FACS provides foster care for nearly 500 children.

Having only a trash bag

to carry their belongings in "sends the wrong message to kids when they're faced with a real difficult time," said child protection supervisor Michelle Bernard.

The initiative is a "powerful gesture," she said, one that tells children they're both valued and cared for.

Bernard called the FACS Foundation fortunate to have many programs, including summer camps, toy drives and post-secondary school bursaries, that are supported by the community.

"This is another program that says to our kids as a community, 'We're talking behind you. We're working together to provide you with things

that you may need during your journey and during your involvement with FACS Niagara."

The organization has already begun handing out the 100 donated bags.

They've been divided between the St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls branch offices and are available to all child protection workers.

Keene hopes the initiative helps to ease what can often be a traumatic experience for children.

"We may not be able to change the world, but we want to give them a little bit of pride so they're not going from home to home with their worldly

belongings in a garbage bag," the store owner said. "I know it seems like a small thing, but there's greater significance than it just being a bag."

The intention is to create a long-term relationship between Canadian Tire and the program to ensure its success in the future, Keene said.

"There are ways we can extend this program. I think this could go even bigger."

"The possibility to add totes to the bags exists through the current partnership and could be supported by other area businesses, she said.

Workman is also hopeful to see totes included in the future and is looking for partners willing to support that additional piece.

She ultimately wants to see Totes for Kids grow to reach other children's aid organizations across Ontario.

Workman got emotional as she spoke about what it means to her to help children facing such difficult circumstances.

"I don't know if I can put that into words," she said, taking a pause to reflect.

"It's not a huge project, but it just feels really important."

She credits her husband Doug Youmans and daughter Arwyn Youmans-Youmans for their assistance in getting the initiative off the ground.

"It's sort of been a family affair," she said, adding each has done their part to show support.

Donations for Totes for Kids can be made by calling the FACS Foundation at 905-937-7731.

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Sunday Jan 8 1:00-2:20pm	Thurs Jan 12 1:00-2:00pm	Monday Jan 9 1:00-2:00pm	Friday Jan 6 10:00-11:00am Tues Jan 10 1:00-2:00pm	Friday Jan 6 9:00-10:00am Tues Jan 10 8:00-9:00am	Monday Jan 9 10:00-11:00am Thurs Jan 12 9:30-10:30am	Monday Jan 9 9:30-10:00am	Thurs Jan 5 2:00-3:00pm Monday Jan 9 11:00am-Noon	Friday Jan 6 7:30-9:30pm Tuesday Jan 10 7:00-9:00pm

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